

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 19 November 2019, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Bibby	M Hindle
A Brown	S Hirst
J Clark	S Hore
S Fletcher	A Knox
J Hill	D Peat

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services and Head of Revenues and Benefits.

Not in attendance: S Carefoot.

386 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M French, J Rogerson and R Thompson.

387 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Reference was made to Minute 263 – Luncheon Clubs – the Chief Executive informed Committee that the Christmas Grant Scheme seemed to be successful so far and that as well as luncheon clubs it had also been opened to parishes as long as their Christmas event was open to all of the community. A report reviewing the success of the Christmas Grants would be reported back to Committee in due course.

388 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 13 – Voluntary Organisation Grants.

389 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

390 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report recommending a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21 to Full Council.

Committee were reminded that part of package of welfare reform measures, the Government had decided to abolish Council Tax benefit from 1 April 2013 and replace it with locally determined schemes of Council Tax support. Our scheme

matched the previous Council Tax benefit scheme but was set to cap the maximum reduction in support for working age claimants to 12% each year. Each billing authority was required to consider the scheme that it has in place each year and a table outlining the position across Lancashire was included in the report.

The Local Government Finance Bill imposes a duty on billing authorities to consider whether to revise or replace its scheme by 11 March each year and to consult with major precepting authorities and other persons likely to have an interest in the scheme if any significant changes are proposed.

Ribble Valley Borough Council currently grant approximately £1m in LCTS to 1,042 pensioners and £0.8m to 1,009 working age claimants.

Committee were informed that no significant changes other than maintaining and uprating income disregards non-dependant deductions, applicable amounts and premiums in line with housing benefit were proposed.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee recommend to Full Council the approval of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21 as outlined in the report. ***

391 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval on proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2020. These proposals were the first stage in the review of the Committee's budget for the forthcoming 2020/21 financial year.

The Budget Working Group had considered the overall 3-year budget forecast which assumes that fees and charges are increased overall by 2%. The Council's latest budget forecast allows for a 2% increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges and this review aims to increase budgeted income for 2020/21 by this amount as a minimum. After applying this percentage increase, proposed charges have generally been rounded up and down to minimise any problems with small change which inevitably impacts on the individual percentage rise for each separate charge, particularly when the charge is low.

The proposed set of fees and charges was set out for Committee's information.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the level of fees and charges to be levied for this Committee for 2020/21 as outlined in the report at Annex A.

392 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee were asked to approve the writing-off of Council Tax and Business Rate debts relating to one company which had been liquidated. Reasonable steps by various means had been taken to collect the debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £230.85 in Council Tax and £60 costs and £4,856.28 Business Rates and £120 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW AND NEW BIDS

The Director of Resources submitted a report recommending the future 5-year Capital Programme for the financial years 2020/21 to 2024/25 for this Committee.

For this Committee there were originally 7 schemes approved for the financial years 2020/21 to 2023/24 totalling £476,700. Following a review of these schemes proposed amendments to 2 previously approved schemes had changed:

- Dewhurst Road, Langho – resurfacing works. Corporate Management Team had recommended bringing forward this scheme from 2022/23 to 2020/21 due to the increasingly poor condition of the road. The scheme value had been reduced by £2,700 to £65,800 to reflect 2020/21 prices.
- ICT Infrastructure Refresh, including PC's – the replacement PC's element of the 2022/23 scheme was no longer required because a separate replacement PC scheme was now taking place in 2019/20, after the Council was noted that extended support for Windows 7 will cease in January 2020 and a further replacement PC scheme bid was being made for 2024/25. The overall scheme value for 2022/23 had therefore been reduced by £63,400 to £116,600.

Heads of Service had been asked to put forward new bids for 2024/25 and 7 had been submitted totalling £239,480. Three of the new bids had been requested for earlier years than 2024/25 and had been included in the proposed Capital Programme for those years.

Members were reminded that other Committees had received similar reports for new scheme bids and that all these bids would be finally considered alongside each other by the Budget Working Group and Policy and Finance Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the proposed 5-year Capital Programme for 2020/21 to 2024/25 as outlined in the report; and
2. recommend to Policy and Finance Committee a future 5-year Capital Programme for this Committee to be considered alongside all others.

CREATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of a matter that was raised at Council on 15 October 2019 requesting Committee to set up a Climate Change Working Group. It was suggested that the Working Group consist of 4 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrats and 1 Independent and that its remit was to consider how the Council was meeting the challenge of climate change, both in relation to how the Council provides its own services and how it provides wider support to the community in their efforts to tackle climate change.

The Working Group would report their findings to the Policy and Finance Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to the setting up of a Climate Change Working Group with the following representation: Councillors S Atkinson, J Clark, S Bibby, D Berryman, R Thompson and 2 Liberal Democrats.

395 CANTEEN REFURBISHMENT

The Director of Resources submitted a report requesting Committee's approval for additional revenue budget in order to refurbish the staff canteen. She informed Committee that it had been some time since this area had been refurbished and it was now showing significant signs of wear and tear. Engagement had recently taken place with both staff and the union to seek suggestions on how the staff canteen could be improved.

She also highlighted that the recent Peer Review had recommended that the Council look at matters relating to staff recruitment and retention.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the canteen refurbishment as set out in the report at a maximum cost of £12,000 funded from the equipment reserve.

396 REFERENCE FROM COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – PROPOSED ELECTRIC CHARGERS IN RIBBLE VALLEY CAR PARKS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider a request from Community Services Committee to agree to the approval of additional revenue budget of £7,500 in 2019/20 for the installation of electric vehicle charging points at Railway View and Chester Avenue car parks in Clitheroe.

There was a potential for a contribution of £5,000 towards these costs from Whalley Hydro but as yet was unknown and the cost of this scheme would be met from the equipment earmarked reserve.

At its meeting the Community Services Committee had approved the request and the resolution of the meeting was outlined for Committee's information.

Committee asked various questions with regard to the electric charging points and the wider issue of car parking, particularly in Whalley.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the request for the additional revenue budget of £7,500 and note the potential for a contribution of £5,000 towards these costs from Whalley Hydro; and
2. approve the use of the equipment earmarked reserve to fund the additional revenue budget approval.

397 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC COSTS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report informing Members of the costs advised by the Planning Institute following the

close of the Examination which were significantly greater than the fees anticipated of £20,000 and asking them to consider an increase in the budget provision to fund the increase in the Inspector's fees.

The Housing and Economic Development DPD had recently been adopted at Full Council on 15 October 2019 following receipt of the Inspector's report and a positive outcome to the Examination in Public. The Council had now been advised by the Planning Inspector of the fees payable which were given as £79,465.30. A breakdown of the fees had been submitted with the daily fee fixed in legislation through statutory instrument at £993 per day.

Following clarification with PINS around the actual number of hearing days and confirmation that additional days for refreshing as a result of the Inspector's return to work after his illness were not included; the Council had been advised that the charges had been reduced by 6 days giving a fee of £73,507.

It was felt that this fee was excessive but the issue remained that the only known factor is the fixed daily charge and the programme sitting days and that no comparative for individual inspectors and related workloads or report writing time was available, which made it impossible to budget accurately for the process.

For future examinations the costs would be tracked during the process.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the total cost of £73,507 for the Inspector's fees for the HEDDPD Examination and that given the issues identified regarding the fee process, asks the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State, the LGA and the MP to express Members' strong concerns about the system of fee charging and the inability to plan expenditure; and
2. agree the additional budget of £43,507 be met from general fund balances.

(Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

398 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS – CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU PERFORMANCE MONITORING INFORMATION

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to receive and consider the performance monitoring information provided by Ribble Valley Citizens' Advice Bureau for the quarter ending September 2019 and to consider whether to approve payment for the next quarterly instalment of the voluntary organisation grant to the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

At the meetings in both June and September 2019 quarterly monitoring information had been provided and considered and Committee had approved the release of the second and third instalments to the agreed grant, bring the total paid to date of £39,375.

The Manager of the Citizens' Advice Bureau had now supplied monitoring information for the latest quarter available up to the end of September 2019, along with explanatory notes which was included for Committee's information.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the payment of the Voluntary Organisation Grant for the final quarter to the Citizens' Advice Bureau of £13,125.

(Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher returned to the meeting.)

399 COUNCIL TAXBASE 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the Council Tax base for 2020/2021. The Council Tax base was set each year between 1 December and 31 January and is an important calculation which sets out the number of dwellings to which Council Tax is chargeable in an area or part of an area. To calculate the Tax base for an area, the number of dwellings in each Council Tax band is adjusted to take account of any discounts, premiums or exemptions. The resulting figure for each band is then multiplied by its proportion relative to band D and the total across all eight bands is calculated. These are then multiplied by the authority's estimated collection for the year.

As last year it was not proposed that any changes be introduced for the forthcoming year. The Council Tax base has increased steadily over the period 2007/08 to 2013/14, however since then increases have averaged at 1.5% to 2% each year. The Council Tax base for 2020/21 is £23,623.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

400 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing Committee with a monitoring report on treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2019 to 30 September 2019. The report outlined the following topics:

- Public Works Loan Board
- Borrowing requirements
- Temporary investments
- Local government bonds agency
- Prudential indicators
- Approved organisations
- Recent events
- Exposures to risk

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

401 REVENUE MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating Members on the position for the period April to September 2019 of this year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned. The report outlined by cost centre a comparison between actual expenditure and the original estimate for the period to the end of

September and highlighted the variations along with the budget holders' comments and agreed actions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

402 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Members of the overall revenue position for the current financial year up to the end of September 2019. The report showed the overall spend by cost centre compared to the revenue estimated and details of variances.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

403 CAPITAL MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing Members with information on the progress of this Committee's 2019/20 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2019. The report gave a summary of the Policy and finance Capital Programme budget expenditure to date and the variances and included the full capital programme by scheme with detailed financial information and budget holders' comments. The total approved budget for this Committee's capital programme of eight schemes was £280,540. As at the end of September 2019 £45,241 had been spent or committed which equated to 16.1% of the annual capital programme budget for this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

404 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information relating to the progress of the Council's approved capital programme for the period to the end of September 2019. The total approved budget for the 2019/20 overall capital programme was £4,099,300 for 33 schemes.

At the end of September 2019 £2,243,530 had been spent or committed which equated to 54.7% of the overall capital programme budget for 2019/20.

The report outlined the main reasons for the underspend on the full year budget to date, 11 schemes had been completed already, 14 schemes were currently on track to be completed in year, 3 schemes were in progress but would not be fully completed in year, 3 other schemes may not be completed in year and 2 schemes were ongoing housing grant schemes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

405 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee considered a report which covered the following:

- National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR)
- Council Tax

- Sundry Debtors
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Performance
- Housing Benefit Overpayments

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

406 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA)

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee's information upon the Council's use of its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. He reported that the Council had not used RIPA in the last six months.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

407 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group meeting held on 19 September 2019.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

408 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from Representatives on Outside Bodies.

409 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the fact that the following item of business be exempt information under Category 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

410 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee considered a report asking them to approve the writing off of Council Tax debts relating to one case where a Council Tax debtor had a debt relief order and two whom are bankrupt where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to the writing off of £5,309.86 of Council Tax debts and £300 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 7.36pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (425111).